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ABSTRACT

This paper, published in 1959, addresses adult education for blacks. Six categories of vocational, remedial, and continuing needs of blacks are identified: (1) rights, privileges, and obligations of citizenship; (2) economic competence; (3) adjustment to rapid social change; (4) attitude changes and self-image; (5) higher levels of basic literacies; and (6) leadership development. Forces that inhibit the development of adult education programs are described: adherence to academic tradition, narrowness of perspective about the social responsibility of schools, social unrest, lack of leaders, inadequate financial resources, and cultural isolation. Positive forces are also discussed: a general increase in educational level, increased mobility, a changed atmosphere in the South, and research relevant to blacks. The initiatives of the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults in support of black education are mentioned. The paper concludes that much work remains to be done to bring blacks into the mainstream of adult education. (SK)

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ADULT EDUCATION— A POLEMIC

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ADULT EDUCATION— A POLEMIC

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CENTER *for the* **STUDY OF LIBERAL EDUCATION FOR ADULTS**

Adult Education—A Polemic

By PETER E. SIEGLE AND ANDREW P. TORRENCE

IN AMERICAN ADULT EDUCATION today there are many forces at work. These forces run the gamut from fundamental education and literacy training to the highest form of philosophical thought as manifest in the liberal education of university presidents and deans at Pugwash, Nova Scotia.* In principle, no segment of the population is without opportunity for adult education, remedial or continuing. The pronouncements of men in public life, of distinguished educators and business leaders, of politicians and philosophers, of social workers and employment officers, all indicate a deep concern for helping Americans become *engaged* with education throughout life. Indeed, in practice, millions of Americans take advantage of the large variety of adult education offerings found in universities, colleges, secondary schools, voluntary organizations, and religious institutions. Year after year, even with inadequate statistical devices for determining the accuracy of the data, increasing numbers of adults are believed to be participating in some kind of educational activity.

Much has been written and spoken about adult education. Great attention has been paid to the philosophy, psychology, sociology, methodology and pedagogy of adulthood. All of these facets of adult education have been scrutinized through systematic research, albeit often descriptive and polemic. Much of it is highly derivative from psychology and sociology, and from education which is in itself an applied derivative discipline. Very little has concerned itself with the Negro as such.

It is not the purpose of this article to discuss adult education research in general nor research in adult education among Negroes in specific. The interested reader can discover most of the important and relevant research in two documents:

* An adult summer residential seminar at which Presidents and Deans of liberal arts colleges continue their own liberal education through the study of philosophy, literature, and the arts.

An Overview of Adult Education Research, by Edmund deS. Brunner and Associates, published by the Adult Education Association of America in 1959; and "A Bibliography on Negro Adult Education," mimeographed by the Clearinghouse of the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults. Rather, this paper wishes to present a point of view; a way of looking at the problem of adult education among Negroes, and a description of one overall effort to deal with the question.

The Dialectic of Need

This is a dialectic of need based on the assumption that before one can plan an educational program of significance there must be an analysis of the situation sufficiently complete and yet sufficiently specific not only to allow the practitioner to see the relationship of his own role to the total need, but also to aid the individual educator and various educational institutions and agencies in establishing appropriate priorities of action. It is a Deweyesque system of social inquiry which hopefully leads to action.

Accordingly, if one attempts to identify the problems and concerns of the Negro community in the South which might have implications for adult education, one discovers at least six nonexhaustive categories of need.

The first of these deals with the question of *rights, privileges, and obligations of citizenship.* It entails: a) identifying leaders and helping these leaders assume the obligation to concern themselves with the citizenship needs of all segments of the Negro population; b) facing up to the problem of breaking down the social distance that exists among the various segments of the Negro community. This is conceived partly as a problem of working with alumni and undergraduates to help them gain a sense of responsibility; c) providing the kind of education for all segments of the community which will enable them better to understand their rights, privileges and obligations; d) providing knowledge and awareness, particularly to the backward elements, of what possibilities and services are available to them.

The second category deals with *economic competence* as manifested in: a) vocational training, actually preparing people to do a better job at *available* vocations; b) consumer education, helping individuals and groups acquire a better knowledge of available goods and services (especially government services), and a more complete understanding of

such matters as insurance and credit-buying; c) anticipation and preparation for a changing economy and changing economic roles of the Negro in labor, management, and the professions.

The third area concerns *adjustment to rapid social change,* involving the plight of the southern migratory worker; the increasing urbanization of the rural south, and the migration of southern Negroes to southern and northern urban areas. This leads to a need for providing appropriate education not only to prepare the Negro for adjusting to the problems of the city, but also to aid his adjustment once he has arrived in the city.

Category four is somewhat elusive, but must be faced, particularly in the light of developments in desegregation and integration. It involves *Attitude Changes in the Negro Community* as related to improvement of the Negro's self-image. Essentially the Negro's cultural isolation must be broken down. Education must concern itself with ways of helping the Negro get rid of dependency feelings and concomitantly to build up his sense of belonging to the American community. Along this line adult education must deal with ways of effecting a more appropriate system of communication between the races, and of establishing realistic race relations goals which are achievable within a reasonable time limit.

The fifth need is for *developing higher levels of basic literacies.* Reference here is made not only to the kind of literacy involved directly in reading and writing, but also to a plural concept which involves literacy in health, family relations, knowledge of available services, or understanding of political and economic rights and privileges. It is assumed that such literacy education occurs best in meaningful situations in which, for example, one learns to read and write for some immediate purpose such as to perform a citizenship function: to vote, to pass registration tests, to read a government pamphlet.

The final category of need revolves around the problem of *leadership development,* to identify and develop leadership in the Negro community, with particular emphasis on making *de facto* leaders into leaders with a sense of responsibility for the entire community. Among these groups who appear to be educable for more effective leadership are religious leaders, school teachers, social workers, and college personnel. A second group of leaders are those who are not already in positions of eminence, persons who have the potential, but who have not yet been discovered or who have not yet discovered themselves. Leaders at both levels must be

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helped to learn how to organize the community, to develop methods for implementing community goals and for developing strategy and tactic for the achievement of Negro goals.

The foregoing needs are vocational, remedial, and continuing. They must be met if adults are to achieve their greatest potential in this complex society. That they be met is also important to the national defense, the national economy, and the social and cultural progress of this country. They can be, and are being, partially met by improvements in elementary, secondary, and collegiate education, and in the long-range future we can be confident that such education will have its positive effects. But education begets more education; and adults must continue to learn throughout life, particularly when changes occur so fast that few of us are truly prepared for them.

Current thinking emphasizes that adult education is desirable in the good society. For those groups who have been historically disadvantaged, it is an absolute must. The need among Negroes is great. Yet one cannot be entirely sanguine about being able to meet that need without a struggle. For there are many forces in the Negro as well as the white society which have served to hold back needed progress even when the need has been recognized. Examination of these negative forces hopefully will facilitate the process of development of programs appropriate to the needs of Negro adults.

Negative Forces

Forces which tend to inhibit the development of adult education programs can be found in the academic and social institutions as well as in the social structure of the society as a whole. They include: stringent adherence to the academic tradition, narrowness of perspective, social unrest, sparsity of leaders, inadequate financial resources, and cultural isolation.

Academic respectability has become an increasingly dominant motif in the life of Negro educational institutions in the past ten years. Because the possibilities of complete acceptance and recognition by accrediting associations has been so imminent, these institutions have devoted their energies to the traditionally accepted academic pursuits. Such efforts tend to weaken the drive to use their resources for curricula or programs which might divert them from their immediate goal of achieving and

maintaining respectability. Such an attitude is certainly understandable in view of the priorities involved. But as Negro high schools and colleges gain full accreditation; as they gain acceptance in the family of American educational institutions; as the possibility of derogation of their programs because of their peripheral activities becomes more remote; these institutions become less reluctant and more attracted to adult education programs.

A second hindrance to the development of adult education in Negro educational institutions is the narrow and sometimes hazy conception they have of the social responsibilities of schools. Though the number of schools with this point of view has declined in the last decade, there are still too many that believe their educational responsibility to society ends with the graduation of their students. If Negro educational institutions are most effectively to serve the public, they must include as a part of their stated and pursued objectives, the education of adults. To do less would be to deny every sign and trend of modern educational institutions and to bypass an opportunity to render a large and more immediately rewarding service in terms of seeing the things that are taught put to use. Some preliminary investigations among Negro colleges, begun in 1958 by the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, indicated that most institutions did not have a clear understanding of the scope and potentiality of adult education. Some colleges, actually engaged in adult education, had not previously conceived of the work as such. While some schools viewed adult education narrowly as remedial or vocational, others viewed it just as narrowly in the other direction—liberal arts. Few viewed it broadly as a guided continuing learning experience aimed at producing changes in relevant skills, knowledge, understanding, and appreciation in people engaged fulltime in the ordinary occupational pursuits of life.

A third factor inhibiting the development of adult education in Negro educational institutions is the social unrest in the South. In some communities citizens are denied the use of school buildings for meetings of adults. Teachers jeopardize their jobs by teaching about citizenship responsibilities, human rights, and certain basic American principles of democracy. Consequently, adult education along these lines has been sponsored largely by civic and social organizations that have organized for this purpose or have added this function to the regular objectives of the organization.

Sparsity of trained and knowledgeable leaders in this area is another hindrance to the development of adult education in Negro educational institutions. Very few Negro professional educators have had training and experience in teaching adults. For the vast majority that have not, some training and/ or guidance for the teaching of adults is necessary. Teaching adults, and developing appropriate curricula for adults, is difficult unless one is appropriately trained to deal with the special characteristics of adults as learners. Because adults are more mature, because their experiences have different meanings, because their motivations to learn are differently oriented; they learn at different paces, sometimes faster, sometimes slower than youth. For this reason, to teach adults successfully requires a special orientation to exercise caution in neither overestimating nor underestimating their capacity. Most teachers have difficulty making the transfer to this kind of teaching, and therefore develop a reluctance to engage in it. This can be a genuine barrier.

Money, of course is another important hindrance. In some instances, where other conditions may be fairly favorable, inadequate finance to support adult education programs has inhibited its realization. Adult education programs cost money varying from small amounts to considerable sums depending on the nature of what is being taught. Parodoxically, very often, where the need is greatest, the available and necessary funds are most limited. Where the school is most able partially to underwrite a program, the adults are most able to pay for the service. Similarly, where the adults are least able to pay sufficient fees to support adult education, the school is often financially unable to underwrite it.

Finally, the cultural isolation of the Negro and his educational institutions from other Americans and their educational institutions has been a limiting factor in the development of adult education for Negroes. For one reason or another the Negro and his institutions have not been part of the mainstream of adult education. Too few individuals are members of and participate in such adult education organizations as the Adult Education Association of the U.S.A. and the National Association of Public School Adult Educators. No Negro institution holds membership in the National University Extension Association, and only one in the Association of University Evening Colleges. However, during recent years, Negro membership in the Adult Education Association has been on the increase and efforts are being made to encourage more individuals

and schools to join all of the appropriate adult education organizations.

The foregoing discussion on negative or inhibiting factors in the development of adult education among Negroes might tend to lead to discouragement were it not for the fact that bringing them to light, and placing them in a discutable framework actually facilitates further inquiry into the problem. Moreover, examination of these forces leads to a search for other counter forces which, in fact, facilitate the progress of adult education among Negroes.

Positive Forces

Fortunately there are many forces at work in the world which make it possible for those concerned with adult education among Negroes to look into the future with some confidence. The general increase in educational level is a case in point. It tends to increase the demand for more education. Increasing mobility of the population, while creating a need for education to aid readjustment, also creates tensions in mobile individuals which make them feel their own needs. Likewise the constant improvement in occupational opportunity for Negroes sharpens the focus on education as a means to successful negotiation of new tasks.

Perhaps the most significant single positive force is the whole atmosphere of the South stemming from the desegregation issue and the renascence of a sense of dignity and validity that emerges from the children of Little Rock and Clinton, from the grownups of Montgomery and Tallahassee. There is a kind of *goal gradience* in the air which has people poised to learn if appropriate methods can be found to engage them in the educational enterprise.

Concomitant with these *atmospheric* conditions there appears to be a response within the educational fraternity itself which represents a counter force to the narrowness of perspective discussed in the section on negative forces. One of these forces is the emergence of adult education as a profession in the population at large. This makes it possible for more Negroes to study and learn about methods, materials, and philosophies of adult education. Although such professional training is new, several Negroes have pursued it in the universities. Indeed, one professor, whose Doctorate was received in Adult Education, has made one course mandatory for all teacher training students at the State College for which he works. Several

Master's theses and Doctoral dissertations have already been written or are currently being written by and about Negroes in the field of adult education.

Another development in adult education of Negroes in the past decade is the establishment of separate adult education administrative units for the conduct of adult education in some colleges, and the establishment of regular evening programs of adult education in some colleges, and the establishment of regular evening programs of adult education in some high schools. Only a few institutions have done this so far, but it is a step in the right direction and it is hoped that many will follow the trend.

A very important development that has facilitated Negro adult education in the past decade is the relevant research being conducted. Negro colleges as well as other educational and governmental agencies are producing more research along this line than ever before. Most of the research produced by Negro colleges on adult education is of a local and practical nature directed at assessing needs of adults and potential for meeting these needs. It represents the beginnings of a healthy rapprochement between adult education and other disciplines such as Sociology and Psychology, whose contributions to community research is invaluable. It points up the necessity for understanding the total problem in order most effectively to develop programs which are appropriate to attainable goals and which utilize all appropriate resources in the community. It establishes strengths and weaknesses, and outlines clearly gaps in resources which must be filled. In brief, it provides clarity of perspective not often found in the programs which somehow just *happen*.

This examination of research indicates the importance of the Leadership role of the Negro college in the total adult education picture. Within the Negro community the college is the repository of the greatest amount of knowledge and expertise on the subject of society and education. Hence, it is the belief of the authors that one of the most potent, even though latent, forces in behalf of adult education is the Negro institution of higher education. Accordingly, they have been concentrating their attention on this particular aspect of the problem.

Two preliminary surveys, for example, have been completed by the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults in an effort to get some feeling of present adult education programs in Negro colleges and

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the image that these colleges have of their own resources, potential and responsibility for adult education. Based on these studies, some very interesting implications can be drawn:

1. Adult education programs of most of the colleges are post World War II developments and have made their most pronounced advance within the last ten years. Moreover, there appears to be a direct relationship between the length of time a college has shown an interest in adult education and the firmness of its adult education program.

2. Negro colleges have widely varying programs of adult education that extend from nothing, through very anemic emergent programs, to highly developed full-blown programs that encompass a galaxy of activities, including evening courses, extension courses, short courses, workshops, conferences, Saturday courses, correspondence courses, and T.V. series.

3. The Negro college adult education clientele varies in age, status and role, grade-level completed, and occupation. It tends to be middle class or agricultural. The occupational groups that get the most attention from Negro college adult education programs in descending order seem to be in-service teachers, ministers, and farmers.

4. The main problems encountered in offering college adult education seems to be financial.

5. Most schools feel that the number of courses *now being offered* by them is only a small percentage of the number that *would be appropriate* for them to offer.

6. Most of the colleges feel that public schools and certain civic organizations should offer educational programs to reach certain occupational groups.

7. According to responses to the surveys, colleges and universities should be *directly responsible* for adult education in their communities.

8. It is felt by many that by sponsoring adult education, the college itself becomes expanded, improved and enabled better to achieve its general objectives.

To say that the colleges are interested in adult education and that they have *direct* responsibility for the education of adults, is of great importance. But it is also important to enter the caveat that there are some educational activities which can best be carried on directly by other agencies in the community such as voluntary organizations, the public schools, professional and trade groups. What is most significant, however, is the fact that the colleges have a distinctly important role to play even when the programs are conducted by other agencies. The college is specially suited to conduct relevant research, to train teachers, and to provide inspiration and leadership for those actually or potentially engaged in adult education.

A Positive Thrust

Because the college looms so important in the adult education picture, the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults has concentrated its efforts on clarifying the relationship between the college and other potential agencies for adult education vis-a-vis assumed needs of the Negro in the South. But short-term and long-term goals are being established in cooperation with the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. The primary focus of this activity is the establishment of an action-oriented investigation of adult education potential in the South, and the development of a system whereby those interested in adult education can get the greatest possible help in furthering their work.

The history of the Center's involvement in this project indicates that one major problem is the awakening of Negro educators to a realization of the importance of the role adult education can play in relation to Negro needs. Indeed there is still great need to point up the scope of adult education for people whose primary emphasis has been naturally placed upon up-grading existent educational activities for youth at the elementary, secondary, and collegiate levels. Since 1956, however, some progress has been made on a firm basis involving not only the Center and the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, but also the Fund for Adult Education whose grants to the Center have helped make the work possible.

The current project actually began when, at the November, 1956 meeting of the Association of University Evening Colleges, G. W. C.

Brown,* Supervisor of the Evening College and Adult Services of the Norfolk Division of Virginia State College, requested that the Center initiate a project aimed at promoting adult education in Negro colleges. Sensing the crucial need for such a program as explained by Dr. Brown, the Center co-sponsored with the Norfolk Division of Virginia State College a conference to discuss "The Responsibility of Negro Colleges for Adult Education" at the Norfolk Division, Virginia State College, May 9-12, 1957. Although the conference was stimulating, its focus was not sharp enough to effect appropriate action.

Hence, in July, 1958 the Center called a meeting of leaders (primarily presidents) of several Negro colleges, the purpose of which was: "to identify problems and concerns in the Negro community in the South about which Negro institutions of higher education can do something through the education of adults."

Three results of that meeting are noteworthy here:

1. A better understanding of what adult education means. All institutions represented were in some measure already engaged in some form of education for adults, although in some cases it had not previously been conceived as such.

2. The recognition of certain categories of prevailing problems and needs within the Negro community and the agreement that institutions of higher education can and should assist Negroes successfully to meet their problems and needs through a program of education for adults.

3. The selection of a committee to plan and present at the December, 1958 meeting of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools a proposal that the Association commit itself to adult education. This, the Association did in addition to appointing an Advisory Committee* to work with CSLEA and to allocating a modest sum of money for use by that committee in building a framework within which adult education can move forward.

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* Dr. Brown was then, and still is, the only Negro member of the Association of University Evening Colleges.

* The Advisory Committee consists of B. R. Brazeal, S. J. Wright, S. M. Nabrit, F. A. Tolliver, R. P. Daniel, G. W. C. Brown, C. H. Parrish.

On the assumption that the colleges have a particular leadership role to play in adult education, the committee has concentrated on getting the colleges to assume that responsibility. Specific activities in this connection have involved research, conferences, workshops, and consultation. Since 1958, the following events have taken place: (1) twenty-eight representative colleges have appointed persons to be in charge of developing programs for adults; (2) a workshop on adult education has been held at Fisk University, attended by these appointees; (3) Cooperative working arrangements have been developed with the U.S. Office of Education, the National Association of Public School Adult Educators, and other groups concerned with relevant adult education; (4) consultation is being provided through the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, the Association of University Evening Colleges, National Association of Public School Adult Educators (especially for public schools), and the Adult Education Section of the United States Office of Education for institutions moving ahead either with expansion of existing programs or with the development of new programs; (5) a research advisory committee, consisting of social scientists and educators, familiar with the problems of the South, has been appointed and has helped formulate preliminary plans for needed research;* (6) preliminary status studies and fact-finding research have been started, and instruments to be used for institutional research are being developed; (7) field trips have been made by Center staff to some participating institutions where significant observations were made and consultations with certain leading educators and sociologists were held; (8) printed materials relevant to adult education and helpful to participating institutions are being mailed periodically to persons assigned to responsibility for program development in their schools.

Research is at the heart of this program. But lest the reader fear that it will be all research and no action, let him be assured that whatever research is conducted will be immediacy-oriented and designed to help all educators concerned. The research might be called "Action Research" because it will be designed to indicate appropriate directions for educational action in given situations. It will include data gathering, method-

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* The Research Advisory Committee consisted of Horace Mann Bond, C. H. Parrish, Lewis Jones, Hylan Lewis, Bonita Valien, Aaron Brown.

ology, and pilot projects designed to develop models appropriate to each type of situation.

The first substantive research project is planned for co-sponsorship by the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools and the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, and is aimed at systematically developing, testing, and using an instrument designed to record data concerning the college; educational needs, desires and interests of adults in its community; and other educational agencies in the community that will serve as the basis for planning and carrying out immediate and long term adult education programs. The study will probably cover a six-months period and involve approximately five colleges selected according to institutional and situational typologies. The instrument that is developed and used for collecting data will be made available to other institutions wishing to conduct similar studies. Moreover, findings in the study may be of enormous value to schools as the basis of request to foundations to underwrite action programs to assuage needs of adults revealed by the study, but which the school cannot afford to finance.

This first study appears to have high priority because it sets the stage for action by providing any institution with a workable guide to analyzing its own situation to the extent that it will know the needs of the community it serves, will have a sharper focus on the adult education potential, and will be able clearly to indicate not only its own role, but also what agencies can most effectively accomplish the task, what priorities must be set, and what series of steps must be taken to get the job done. And it is the *job* that counts.

Summary and Polemic

In general, adult education is a burgeoning activity in America. Among Negro educational institutions it has made notable progress in the past few years, but not enough considering the potentiality and the need. Recent developments, however, indicate that an acceleration is underway which can lead to an important realistic advancement consistent with the demands of the times and the tradition of service in Negro institutions at all levels. There is indication that adult education is being conceived as a life-long process encompassing not only remedial and vocational programs, but also liberal and continuing education for all segments of the society.

One of the most significant developments of recent years has been the interest of Negro institutions of higher education which have assumed leadership role, recognizing their responsibility not simply to the small segment of the Negro population currently capable of going to college, but also to the entire community. The commitment of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, the increasing number of institutions appointing individuals to be in charge of program development, the graduate studies in adult education, the theses and dissertations, the very fact of this article in the Anniversary issue of the *Negro Educational Review,* all attest to the significance of adult education among Negroes.

But we are only on the threshold of an era. The work yet to be done is staggering. We have just begun to pull together an articulate integration of adult education forces in the Negro community. There is still a great need to articulate the needs in realistic educational terms. Professional and lay teachers must be trained. Negro leadership must be educated to their responsibility for the education of the entire community. A much tighter system of communication among adult educators within the Negro community must be developed. Negro adult educators must be brought into the main stream of adult education by participation with their colleagues all over the United States in appropriate Associations such as the Adult Education Association (for all levels), the National Association of Public School Adult Educators (for public school personnel), and (for the collegiate level) the Association of University Evening Colleges, the National University Extension Association, and the Association of Lang Grant Colleges.

This is a polemic. We believe that adult education is here to stay, and that the Negro, because his need and his opportunities are great, is going to be a major contributor to its development in the decades to come.